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THE TRANSFER CULTURE IN COLLEGE BASKETBALL

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Science
in the Department of Health, Exercise Science and Recreation Management
The University of Mississippi

By

ARIEL C. MASSENGALE

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ABSTRACT

In 2017, 18.5% of female women's basketball players transferred. That ranked the highest it has ever been, second on the list for women's sports and higher than any male sport (NCAA.org, 2018). The decision to transfer is a multifaceted issue that involves many reasons from generational differences, social media, technology, among other factors and has been rapidly increasing. For the lack of empirical studies, the foundation of this research was built on studies that focused on student retention because the same reasons a student may be retained could be the very reason a student decides to transfer depending on the individual. Therefore, by observing the current generation of student-athletes that have transferred we can better understand the environmental factors, behaviors and motivations that lead to a life-changing decision. The research used observation and semi-structured interviews from six student-athletes and two coaches to create an understanding of the transfer epidemic. Due to a lack of literature on the student-athlete population, Tinto's 1993 study on student retention and Psychological contract served as the theoretical framework used to create a deeper understanding of why student-athletes transfer. Consistent with past literature, student-athletes left their original institute because of relationships, coaching change/coaching style, lack of playing time, not the right fit, homesickness. This study is a single case with multiple units and the findings limit the ability to generalize results. It can be concluded that female student-athletes who struggle with relationships between coaches and teammates, environmental uncertainty and dissatisfaction with the sport they love to play are more inclined to transfer.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family for their endless love and support throughout this process. I could not have accomplished this milestone without you all. Also, to my guardian angel, my aunt, Vickie Pauline Campbell, this is for you! I love and miss you so much! Continue to watch over us!

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
SAAC	Student-Athlete Advisory Committee
NAIA	National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics
ACC	Atlantic Coast Conference
WNBA	Women's National Basketball Association
AIAW	Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women

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Chapter 1

Introduction

On October 15th, 2018, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) passed new legislation, known as the “notification-of-transfer model” (Notification of Transfer, 2018, p.1). The new regimen allowed for student-athletes to inform their current school of their intentions to transfer, requiring the university to place their name on the national transfer database within two business days. According to Hosick (2018), following their placement on the list, coaches from other universities are able to contact the student athlete. This rule was proposed by the Division I Transfer Working Group along with the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC). This new legislation is proposed two years following an academic year where 886 women basketball players transferred (NCAA, 2012). The student-athlete population is one where little to no research has been conducted, and even less research has been dedicated to why student-athletes decide to transfer. The known literature focuses on student retention and attrition, and there is a sizeable gap regarding why students decide to transfer. There is also limited research focusing on the student-athlete population. In attempts to extend the body of literature on the student-athlete experience, specifically as it relates to transferring, the goal of the current study is to explore student-athlete intentions and experiences with transferring within NCAA sponsored institutions.

Due to the lack of literature regarding the population of transfer students who fall under the student-athlete population, student retention and attrition have been used to distinguish

reasons why (or why not) students transfer. Vincent Tinto is the most prominent researcher to study student attrition and retention and has written extensively on the topic of student dropout. Throughout his study, he addressed reasons for dropouts such as individual characteristics (family background), past educational experiences, goal commitment, interactions within the college environment, academic integration, social integration and institutional commitment (Tinto, 1975). These factors consist of only the identity of “student,” however, there may be another set of factors that focus on the identity of an, “athlete.” In order to acquire the full student-athlete experience, both aspects have to be beneficial to the individual. The goal of this study is to extend the small amount of literature on transfer intentions and experiences and place emphasis on the importance of the situation in order to influence future research and studies. Majority of literature focuses on the retention and attrition of your traditional student, followed by the general student population that transfers, and the smallest amount focuses on student-athletes. An equation for this explanation would be identified such as student retention/attrition < student retention/transfer < student-athlete retention/transfer. Due to this formula the need for the present study is imperative especially since because the student-athlete population is very important to the university experience in more ways than one.

The previous transfer rule required student-athletes to speak with their current coaches and request permission to contact other universities. Coaches and universities had the ability to restrict student-athletes from engaging in conversation with certain coaches/schools (Hosick, 2018). With the increasing numbers of transfers in women’s basketball, ranking highest out of all collegiate sports both male and female, (NCAA, 2012a) the integrity of the game is being challenged daily. ESPN’s Dave Telep studied recruiting for the past sixteen years and attributes the increase number of transfers to:

high schools and Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) teams. As a society we have enabled this generation to go to the next opportunity. They have not learned to fight through adversity. They just look for their next chance. All they are doing is mimicking what they see (Durando, 2012).

By investigating this phenomenon with the assistance of student- athletes who have transferred, plus head and assistant coach perspectives, the goal is to increase understanding in the specific factors that lead to female basketball student-athletes transferring. Findings will be able to help educate college coaches and university administrators on the factors most frequently leading to student-athlete transfer and help them retain their student-athletes.

Purpose statement

The purpose of this study is to understand the factors that influences for an NCAA women's basketball player to transfer from one university to another. There are different transfer levels, which have an impact on the specificities of the definition, but overall a transfer student is an individual who leaves one university or college, for any number of reasons, to attend another. There are three main types of transfers. First, there is low to high, which could be a junior or community college or National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) student-athlete moving to Division I, II, or III. Then there is high to low, which could be a Division I player moving down to Division II or III, or having to go the junior college route. Lastly, there is a parallel transfer where the student-athlete moves laterally to another school within the same division.

Transferring can be a risky decision, as with any decision that could be life changing, but in most cases a student-athlete believes or hopes their collegiate experience will be enhanced if they transfer to another university. In 2013, Hall of Famer, Sylvia Hatchell, and the University of

North Carolina's Women's Basketball team signed the number one overall recruiting class in the country after receiving commitments from four players who ranked in the top twenty-five, with two being in the top ten. In their freshman campaigns the fab four led the Tarheels to a 27-10 record which included wins over in state rival Duke University, a trip to the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) tournament championship game and a trip to the "Elite 8" in the NCAA Tournament. Following what most would call a successful season, the fab four was no more when a member decided to transfer for reasons the student-athlete, "opted to keep what made her unhappy a private matter" (ESPN, 2015). After year two, the rest of the number one recruiting class decided to leave and finish out their eligibility elsewhere. As mentioned above the initial player who transferred declined to acknowledge why she left, keeping the reason a private matter. Another student-athlete left in search for more playing time, one concluded it being a, "mutual decision between player and coaching staff to part ways (Robinson, 2015)," and the last student-athlete's reason for transfer were unknown. An important fact to note is that during the years the transfers took place, the University of North Carolina was undergoing an NCAA investigation regarding the credibility of African-American studies courses deemed as "paper classes" that majority of student-athletes were enrolled in. The classes rarely met and the course consisted of turning in a short paper in return for passing grades (Bonesteel & Hobson, 2017). In conclusion, after years long investigation the findings rendered no academic fraud against the University of North Carolina and the potential postseason bans were no more. The possibilities of what could happen was a "red flag" for the women's program that hurt their current status and future potential recruits while going through the investigation.

Each individual experienced a different outcome, one of the student-athletes encountered an experience that any young woman would dream of when she went on to win a National

Championship, was drafted number four overall in the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) draft, and received the Rookie of the Year award (WNBA Draft 2017, 2017). This is only one example of how transferring can affect a student-athletes life in a positive manner. The WNBA is not the reality of every women's basketball player. The NCAA provides the statistics for women's basketball players that compete beyond high school. Approximately, 4.0% of high school athletes compete at the collegiate level. Of that 4.0%, only 0.9% have the opportunity to play professionally ("Women's Basketball: Probability of competing beyond high school", 2019). Along with the WNBA, women can participate in overseas basketball in countries all over the world, therefore at the completion of the 18-19 season there was only a 6.9% chance for women to play professional basketball. The WNBA draft allots for 36 in each draft, 4 of those spots usually are awarded to international players, reducing that number to 32. The NCAA states in 2018, there was a total of 21% of draft eligible student-athletes and only 2.8% of them were chosen (NCAA.org, 2019). Regardless of professional aspirations, each student-athlete mentioned above graduated from their respective universities, which is, according to the NCAA, the most important goal, and had the opportunity to live out their childhood dream of playing collegiate basketball. For the lack of professional opportunities, the importance placed upon women's basketball from a media and fan base standpoint is the highest height for women in athletics. Therefore, the pressure placed to perform on the highest level while enjoying your college career can lead to movement between colleges for certain individuals. Not every student-athlete has such a positive experience following the big decision to transfer, which places more emphasis on the purpose of this study.

The goal of this study is to answer these following questions regarding the transfer culture present within Division I Women's Basketball:

RQ1: Why do female basketball student-athletes transfer schools/colleges/universities?

RQ2: What factors play a role in the decision-making process of transferring?

RQ3: What can head coaches, athletic directors, and higher education administrators do to retain student-athletes?

The focus of this study will be the Ole Miss Women's Basketball Team. Participants will voluntarily take part in in-depth, semi-structured interviews that will focus on factors that lead to their decision to transfer, their experiences at both universities (with a focus on their current experience) and what advice they would give to the upcoming generation. The expectation versus reality for the current student-athletes will also be discussed and analyzed. Head and assistant coaches will also be interviewed to provide their opinions on the transfer epidemic and interpret the effect it is having on women's basketball as a whole. The interviews will then be analyzed and reoccurring themes will be identified.

In conclusion, the current study attempts to take an in-depth look as to why the transfer rate for women's basketball players has seen a significant increase over recent years. Every athlete has a different experience and someone's dream could be the next persons' worst nightmare. Thus, it is important to provide different perspectives based on the individuality of the student-athlete. Finally, the findings from this study will provide insight and a clearer understanding for intercollegiate athletic administrators and coaches on what student-athletes are searching for during their collegiate experience.

Chapter II

Literature Review

History of NCAA

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), formerly known as the Intercollegiate Athletic Association was formed in 1906 due to the help and aid of President Theodore Roosevelt. Football was initiated in the late 1880's and because of the increasing amounts of injury and death within the sport, the President decided to invite representatives from the competing universities to a meeting that would create rules and regulations that would enhance the safety of intercollegiate athletics. Within recent years, due to the evolution of social media, commercialization and television contracts, the main goal of the NCAA is to eliminate amateurism while placing an emphasis on both academic and athletic excellence. "The NCAA is a member led organization dedicated to the lifelong well-being of college athletes" ("What is the NCAA?", 2019). That well-being is maintained by multiple committees and boards that focus on each aspect of the student-athlete, ranging from a board of governors to post-graduate scholarship committees. The NCAA is now made up of three divisions (Division I, II, and III) with 100 conferences and over 1,100 colleges and universities and nearly half a million student-athletes ("What is the NCAA?", 2019). The divisions are split based upon similarities between, "philosophy, competition and opportunity." Division I consist of 351 universities, Division II has 308 and Division III with 443. In 2018 the total number of student-athletes reached an all-time

high, there were 216,378 female student-athletes, making up 44% of the student-athlete population (Schwarb, 2018).

History of Women Intercollegiate Athletics

Historically, women were not allowed the opportunity to attend college let alone participate in intercollegiate athletics. The beginning of women's participation was 1971 with the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), an organization that was started by a group of female administrators who highlighted the importance of physical activity and healthy eating (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). The AIAW continued through 1981 until they were taken under the leadership of the NCAA. During its time, there were over 1,000 schools and 19 sports for women to participate (Sougstad, 2017). In 1972, the lives of women changed forever. Title IX, a very important amendment, changed the life of every female that aspired to become a student-athlete. Without the implementation of this law, women would not be afforded the opportunities of their male counterparts. The Congress of the United States pronounced Omnibus Education Act of 1972 in which,

“... no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (Acosta and Carpenter, 2000).

This law was the beginning step to equality in sports for women. The AIAW had a mission statement, “Sports for all,” their goal was to provide women the opportunity to play regardless of skill. The NCAA focused only on male athletes, amateurism and making money. The NCAA felt threatened due to the rise of the AIAW and their break into the television industry and in order to maintain their lead on the sport industry, they adopted the AIAW and allowed women to

compete under the NCAA legislation (AIAW vs. NCAA, 2013). Although women have a long way to go in order to truly be seen as equal, this was a step in the right direction.

Transfer Rules

There are many instances that play an integral part in why a student-athlete decides to transfer from their initial institution of choice; family reasons, playing time and coaching change just to name a few. Rules and requirements vary, depending on the current situation. There are also different levels for a student athlete to transfer. A student athlete could be going from junior college to Division I, II, or III, Division I down to Division III or the most common move which is a lateral move from one institution to another at their respective levels. Below the rules for each level will be discussed.

The NCAA is very strict regarding their process of student-athletes transferring to ensure the student-athlete is placed in the best position possible to graduate with a college degree and to ensure an equal playing field for all levels. There is a general rule/requirement that stands for every sport apart of the NCAA across the board for the three different levels (Division I, II, III) when it comes to the regulations.

“A student who transfers (see Bylaw 14.5.2) to a member institution from any collegiate institution is required to complete one full academic year of residence (see Bylaw 14.02.14) at the certifying institution before being eligible to compete for or to receive travel expenses from the member institution (see Bylaw 16.8.1), unless the student satisfies the applicable transfer requirements or qualifies for an exception as set forth in this bylaw” (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 1998, p. 178).

This rule was included in NCAA legislation starting in 1991. A difference in transfer rules can be found in the Division III NCAA manual in which it adds,

“A transfer student (other than one under disciplinary suspension per Bylaw 14.5.1.2) may qualify for an exception to the academic year of residence requirement provided he or she does not have an unfulfilled residence requirement at the institution from which he or she is transferring” (National Collegiate Athletics Association, 2008, p. 100).

In order to be considered a “qualifier” transferring from a two- year college to a 4-year member institution, according to bylaw 14.5.4.1 of the NCAA Division I manual states,

“A transfer student from a two-year college who was a qualifier (per Bylaw 14.3.1.1) is eligible for competition in the first academic year in residence if the student meets the requirements for a non-qualifier to be eligible for competition (per Bylaw 14.5.4.2.1)” (Division I manual p.179).

In order to be deemed as a “qualifier”, the prospective student athlete must have graduated high school, completed 16 core courses acknowledged by the NCAA Clearing House, earned a core GPA of 2.300, received scores on ACT/SAT that are within the ranges provided by NCAA.

Therefore, a “nonqualifier,” is anyone who does not successively achieve each requirement (Test Scores, 2018). Additional mandatory requirements include,

” ...having spent a full-time semester or quarter in residence at a two-year college, minimum grade-point average (GPA) of 2.5 and successful completion of an average of at least 12 semester or quarter hours of transferable-degree credit acceptable toward any baccalaureate degree program at the certifying institution for each full-time academic term of attendance at the two-year college” (Division I manual p. 179).

Student Retention

In order to analyze the factors that influence student-athletes' transfer decision, we must first acknowledge the history of student retention. Over the years, the focus of retention has shifted. Initially it began from a psychological view and has since transpired to more focus on the universities themselves and the commitment they are making to their student body (Berger & Lyon, 2005). The topic of retention has been studied by multiple researchers as the importance of higher education has risen. There are 6 main factors involved which include; the students themselves, campuses, educational roles, socioeconomic contexts and policies and interventions (Berger & Lyon, 2005) that affect student retention. As time and society continue to evolve, the evolution of today's student changes as well. The theory of retention has transpired through the years, initially discovered by J.P. Bean and then expanded by Durkheim. His [Durkheim's] study explained the impact suicide had on dropout numbers (Rivera, 2004). Based off the provided information Bean was able to configure his own theory in which he found 9 themes that contributed to retention. He was able to break down and examine themes from three different perspectives; policy, institutional and individual (Bean, 2005). The policy perspective provided information for the institution itself regarding finances, the institutional perspective targeted the initial reasons why students chose a specific university and individual perspective looks at the interaction between background, behaviors and attitudes play a role (Bean, 2005). Through his research, Bean was able to compile the information into nine themes that he felt culminated his findings. The factors that contributed to student retention included: "intentions, institutional fit and commitment, psychological processes and key attitudes, academics, social factors, bureaucratic factors, the external environment, the student's background and money and finances" (Bean, 2005, p. 218).

The most notable theory when discussing college student retention is Vincent Tinto's (1993) theoretical framework in which he conducted a longitudinal study that combined individual characteristics, expectational and motivational attributes as being an integral part in students' persevering through to complete their higher education obligations (Rivera, 2004). I have found Rivera summarize Tinto's framework of attribution by integrating six factors and actual dropout: "In all, Tinto related attrition to the problems of adjusting to college life, to the congruence between the student and the institution, and to the isolation from the life of the college" (p.23). In Tinto's book, *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student attrition*, he identifies academic difficulties, inability to resolve educational and occupational goals and the failure to become incorporated in new environment as being factors of student departure (Tinto, 1994). In order for students to overcome those obstacles they must experience some form of integration which in turn can relate to the acceptance and support student-athletes need from their coaches, teammates and family. If they feel excluded by either of those groups, that could lead to a difficult transition resulting in a tough college experience and then transferring. In order to avoid such circumstances, Tinto (1994) suggests setting realistic expectations (academically and athletically) for students, bridging the gap, identifying student needs and assisting them in the transition. Institutions and programs that are able to implement and perform consistently, will experience strong relationships between students and faculty, providing students the support they need in order to be successful academically and socially.

Student- Athlete Retention

Due to the lack of literature in all areas regarding the student-athlete population, most researchers have resulted to using the Psychological Contract as a way to relate and discover information regarding the exclusive population. As a result of the intensity of the recruiting

process, a lot of emphasis has been placed on the recruiting portion of intercollegiate athletics and also plays a huge role in why a prospective student-athlete chooses a certain University to spend their 4-year collegiate career. The demands and requirements placed on student-athletes, academically as well athletically, is enough to stress an individual. Daily demands involve 6:00am workouts, class, practice, weights, and study hall in the evening. A routine that is extremely structured and completed every day for a six-month period. The standard of being a college athlete can lead to feelings of isolation, placing emphasis on cohesiveness and camaraderie between coaching staff and teammates (Coakley & Pike, 2014; Hurley & Cunningham, 1984).

In 2004, Christina Rivera's dissertation identified perceived factors that led to the student-athlete retention process. The study consisted of 330 NCAA Division I student-athletes from West Coast universities who either participated in high- or low-profile sports. The researcher used a self-made questionnaire called "Understanding College Student-Athlete Retention". Important information was gained from these results providing viable information regarding factors that influence student athlete retention; one of those reasons being the importance of coach-player-teammate relationships (Rivera, 2004).

Transfer Rates

When analyzing transfer rates, the NCAA breaks it down into three categories (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018). One being a 2-4 transfer which includes those individuals who transferred from a 2-year school, also known as a junior or community college, to a 4-year university. The second category is 4-4 transfer, which are your student- athletes who transfer laterally from a 4-year institution to another 4-year institution. The final category is a combined total of transfers all together. In the year 2017, there were approximately 4,798 women's

basketball student-athletes. 7.6% of them were 2-4 transfers. The highest of any other female sport within the NCAA. Approximately 10.9% were 4-4 transfers, falling in 3rd place behind beach volleyball and tennis. In total, out of the roughly 4,800 student athletes, 18.5% of Division I Women's Basketball players are transfers which falls second, only by 1.1% to beach volleyball. In 2007, there were 4,650 total student athletes, with 16.2% of those being transfers. 2-4 transfer compiled 9.1% while the 4-4 transfer was only 7.1%. Fast forwarding 5 years to 2012, there were 4,742 student athletes, 15.9% of those being transfers. Of that 15.9%, 8.0% were 2-4 transfers and the other 8.0%, 4-4 transfers. The transfer rate averages and trends page on the NCAA website provides data information dating back to 2004. Every year from 2004 to 2017, the transfer rates in women's basketball have fallen above 15%. They can be found in the top 3 sports with the highest rates every year and at times ranking higher than any male sport. From 2004 to 2017, the percentage of 2-4 transfers has decreased by 2.3%, the 4-4 transfer has increased 3.4% and the total amount of transfers increased 1.1%. In the July 2019 edition of *Transfer Composition of Division I Teams*, the 4-4 transfer percentage of 6.7% ranked higher than the amount of 4-4 transfers among men's basketball teams by .07%. Based off the data listed above, the percentages of transfers continue to increase at a positive rate. The more notoriety and changes in NCAA transfer ruling, the more this number can continue to rise, and eventually causing an epidemic that may be hard to recover from (NCAA.org, 2018).

Coaching Change & Coaching Style

There are many reasons as to why a student- athlete may transfer. In this section the goal will be to acknowledge and identify possible reasons why transferring has become so prominent in women's basketball. Each individual is different and what could be enjoyable to one could be unbearable to another. The importance of player- coach relationships is important when deciding

where to spend your collegiate career and in college athletics, unfortunately, coaching changes are almost inevitable for many different reasons. Success can look different depending on the administration and not everyone will obtain it. During the recruiting process, having a thriving relationship with a coach is an important factor, but a change of direction according to administration after your sophomore year can be a blow to any student-athlete. A lack of connectivity to an entirely new coaching staff can be scary causing for a player to transfer to another university where a previous connection already exists.

With the departure of one coaching staff and arrival of another, that did not recruit you, brings about its own dimensions of pros and cons. Every coach is described by the “style” in which they run their program. There are two broad categories that most coaches can fall under. There are your “player coaches” and those that are more demanding and controlling (Mageua & Vallerand, 2003). According to Mageua and Vallerand (2003), the criteria required to being a ‘players coach’ include: allowing choices within realm of limits and rules, provide rationale for tasks, limits and rules, acknowledge others feelings, allow for self-growth and independence, allow for feedback, avoid harsh and demeaning criticism or language and eliminate the fostering of ego-involvement (2003). These coaches tend to have great relationships with their players, an understanding and love that is reciprocated and foster an environment for positive growth and development to occur. Qualities of coaches who are considered to be more demanding include: a strict set of rules with a lack of input from their players, remarks and criticism that is often negative and very assertive (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Depending on the individual, coaches can be demanding and also provide a loving and trustworthy environment for their athletes and there are others who are focused on winning and nothing else. It is for the best interest of the athlete to ask the “right” questions, build genuine relationships and feel a sense of security when

deciphering which system will allow them to be the most productive and have the most success on and off the court.

Lack of Playing Time

There will always be one individual who is frustrated with their lack of playing time, but with the influences of family, friends and social media, everyone believes their talents will take them to the professional leagues. Former Duke University starter and Chicago Bull, Thomas Emma, described in his 2001 article, “Dealing With the Frustration of Lack of Playing Time,” the impact that a lack of playing time can affect the self- image of an athlete, effects the team culture when an athlete feels they are more than capable of performing better than their teammates, and the ability to stay focused on the personal goal of gaining playing time” (Emma, 2018). This can happen at any point throughout a four- year career and regardless of classification it is not something that is found to be easy to deal with. Without the encouragement of family and teammates and support and forwardness with coaching staff, there are many student-athletes that have left schools in seek of a more defining and meaningful role within their program.

Homesick

According to the Student Wellness Services at the University of Northern Iowa, “approximately 1 million, 7%, of the 15 million enrolled college students are homesick. A term that is used when an individual is away from family, friends and familiar environments” (College Homesickness, 2019). Homesickness is very prevalent in the college student population and although it may not be discussed in the world of athletics as much due to the tough persona put on by athletes, it is possible. The combination of feelings being experienced and the intense schedule and demands of student-athletes academically and athletically, the combined stressors

can lead to depression, isolation, poor performance academically and athletically resulting in the student-athlete having to leave for their best interest. Some individuals are able to withstand and conquer, whereas others are not able to handle. This per say has no regards to the University itself, the coaching staff or atmosphere of the program, but an individual preference that can be respected by all parties involved.

Not the Right Fit

Being satisfied with your college experience encompasses the academic, athletic, and social aspects of life. If at any point a student-athlete is unhappy with either of those categories, that can lead to the idea of wanting to transfer. The academic aspect can be described through the typical daily schedule of a student-athlete, which usually begins with weights at 6:00am, breakfast, class from 8:00am -12:00pm, lunch, practice from 1:00pm-6:00pm, dinner, and study hall. It is also important to address when student- athletes are in the middle of basketball season they are forced to miss class and tutoring sessions due to competition and travel. The strenuous of such a schedule and the demand to perform at a high level on the court and in the classroom can at times result in being too overwhelming for a student- athlete to handle. The athletic aspect can be deemed as not a good fit if the student athlete has poor camaraderie with teammates, coaching staff, support staff and the possible the style of play representative of the head coach. Coaches tend to recruit a certain player for their “system,” in most cases they are successful, but there are situations where this is not the case. Lastly, another important facet is the cultural environment. Going off to college is essentially your home away from home and in order to perform at your best on a consistent basis, it is important for student-athletes to adjust and feeling comfortable in their new living environment. Each individual has a different perspective when choosing the location of where to go to school. It is important to be aware of the possible

changes and understand adjusting to the transition and culture shock can be staggering (Duffek, 2017).

Family Issues

From April 2007 to April 2012, the NCAA has received 631 transfer waiver requests for undergraduate students and the majority are due to family member illness or financial hardship (Scarbinsky, 2012). Illness is inevitable and the worst feeling is having a family member fighting a battle alone. Rightfully so the distance between a college student and their loved one is unbearable and although the college experience has been a smooth transition, the need to move closer to home is very important for the student- athlete. There are also situations where the student- athlete becomes ill and although the university is responsible for medical bills, the need for families and peace of mind to be home or closer to home is always an option. This specific reason is one that coaches and training staffs would love to avoid, but unfortunately that is not an option and in most cases the students have to do what they feel is in the best interest of themselves and their families.

The Psychological Contract

The potential theoretical framework that is associated and relates with this study is Psychological Contract in order to comprehend relationships between individuals and organizations (Barnhill et al., 2013). Once again, the research done on the student-athlete population is very limited and therefore the business theories have been utilized for both corporate America and the world of athletics. Due to the commercialization of college athletics, a college program can be referred to as an organization. According to Carnegie Mellon University, Denise Rousseau, Psychological Contract is described as, “individual beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding the terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their

organizations (1995, p.5). Perception is reality, yet at the same time building trust and truly getting to know someone takes time.

There are two different forms of Psychological Contract, depending on nature, but for the purpose of this study we will focus on the nature of Macro. Both forms deal with the relationships and work environments between an employer and the employee. The more positive the relationship, the more productive an employee will be on the job. The main concept of the theory is the filling of fulfillment and The Macro nature focuses on the “wider society.” Funneling down from Macro, there are 2 main types of contracts that researchers highlight; transactional and relational. When referring to the overall theme of Psychological Contract, the goal for each individual involved is the feeling of fulfillment (Barnhill & Turner, 2013). In order to perform at a high level, on a consistent basis, a student-athlete must feel loved and appreciated by coaching staff, teammates and other important personnel around campus. A Transactional Psychological Contract is essentially a written agreement or signed contract between two parties, which can be equivalent to a signed National Letter of Intent (NLI), which is an agreement between a coach/university and the prospective student- athlete, an agreement that is renewed yearly. Whereas, Relational Psychological Contracts are established through, unwritten and written communication. In intercollegiate athletics a Relational Contract would be identified through the verbal and nonverbal communication between a member of the coaching staff and the prospective student- athlete primarily during the recruiting process through phone calls, text messages, emails and/or interactions on social media (Barnhill, C. R., Czekanski, W. A. & Turner, B. A., 2013). That relationship then takes on a new meaning once the student is on campus and under sole control of the head coach, the demands and responsibilities begin to increase. An important factor associated with the Psychological Contract Theory are something

researchers called *Breaches and Violations*. In Elizabeth Morrison and Sandra Robinson's (1997) study, they described a Psychological Contract breach and violation being interchangeable words being explained as, "...when an individual perceives a discrepancy between what they believe they were promised and what they actually received from the organization" (p. 231). During the recruiting process, a prospective student athlete is placed on a pedestal and every college coach is at their disposal. The pampering, chasing and courting that goes on during the process can lead some things being said that may not be fulfilled once the student arrives on campus. A college coach is courting multiples players simultaneously, saying whatever they can to win over the student to come to their school. The ability for a student athlete to decipher what is real and what is not is a very valuable attribute to have and utilize during this time.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, there are substantial gaps in the literature regarding the student-athlete population, also limiting the amount of studies testing this theory on such a unique community. A study that was published in the *Journal of Intercollegiate Athletics* used the above concept to analyze its effects on the levels of trust and intentions to leave their team (Barnhill et al., 2013). The study surveyed 248 NCAA Division I and II student-athletes. The survey accounted for demographics and measured psychological contract breach and violation, cognitive trust, affective trust and intentions to leave (Barnhill & Turner, 2013). The results showed the relationship between coach and players are tainted when a student-athlete feels that coach has not fulfilled their promises. Once the relationship is tarnished the production and trust level of the student slowly declines. The student-athlete is no longer willing to play hard or trust in the process because there is no reward for them. If a coach allows these feelings/emotions to continually linger, the feelings about leaving slowly creep into one's mind and eventually take

over. There are many situations and factors that play a role in ultimately reaching that decision and in most cases, it does not happen overnight. Therefore, it is very important for coaches and support staff members to be aware of what is going on with their student-athletes.

In conclusion, the many reasons listed above lead to insufficient evidence regarding the phenomenon as a whole and therefore increases the need for this study. This topic is becoming an epidemic and a lack of background information, experience and research limits coaching and administrative staffs in handling this situation that best fits their program. In the end, the goal of a University is to provide student-athletes with the resources and platform to be successful on and off the basketball court. The well-being of the student-athlete should always be at the forefront and the results from this study can lead to valuable information that can be helpful for the future of the game.

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

The intent of this chapter is to introduce the case boundaries and methodological approach that will be used to identify the themes and factors associated with why female student-athletes decide to transfer from one university to another. This study is a single case with multiple embedded unit analysis, the six student-athletes (Yin, 2017). In this chapter we will introduce the sample population and how they were chosen, address the methodological approach, describe how the data will be collected and analyzed. Lastly, we will discuss the ethical issues, implications and limitations that coincide with this study.

Setting

The University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) Women's Basketball program was chosen specifically for this study because of the changes to leadership that took place following the 2017-18 season. The initial coaching staff was terminated after five seasons. Six to eight weeks passed before administration announced the next head coach; leaving time for questions, doubt, and uncertainty to arise (Potter, 2018). During that time, nine players requested their release and "permission to contact," other universities. Once the current staff was established, they were left with four players. The need to acquire transfer student-athletes was imperative, resulting in nine new faces upon this year's roster. Transfer student-athletes are the reason why Ole Miss has been able to compete during the 2018-19 season and therefore can be used as a strong starting point for the topic of conversation.

Participants

The six participants of this study were recruited from the University of Mississippi Women's Basketball program along with two members of the coaching staff. Due to my past experiences of playing collegiate basketball and being a student of the game for many years, I was able to draw inferences from personal experience and the experience of others that I knew of or had personal connections with that were a part of the phenomenon. The participants recruited represent a different level of transfer including junior college to Division I, Division I to Division I (graduate transfers also included). The only level that was not included was high to low transfer because each recruited participant landed at Ole Miss.

Data Collection

The following study utilizes semi-structured face-to-face interviews and observations to gain understanding regarding why student-athletes transfer. Due to having an exploratory study concept, interviews will allow for more in depth responses allowing for participants to speak their experience while still providing structure to the interview process (Exploratory Research, 2019). The interview questions are broken into four different categories. Those categories include experience from previous institution, how the decision to transfer came about, the transfer process and their current experience at their new institutions. The specific questions in each category will provide an overview and potential overlap between subjects in order to identify common themes that will provide insight and further explanation. The observations were used to monitor participants facial expression and body language during the interviews.

There is an established relationship between the researcher and participants due to my current role with the participants. Along with that, I will reassure the participants of their confidentiality emphasizing the results of this study will only be used for academic purposes in

order to bridge the gap allowing for participants to be honest and vulnerable during the interview. The interviews will be audio recorded through voice recording to allow for reference during data collection. A separate note pad will be used for personal thoughts of the researcher and observation notes during the interview process. I have a prior relationship with each participant which will allow for open and trustful dialogue during the interview process. Although, the reliability of this study may be challenged due to the small number of participants involved in the study, it can be supported through the detailed description of the study, why the Ole Miss women's basketball program was chosen and the position of the researcher. The results will not be a generalization for the entire population, but will be groundwork for a topic that is only becoming more and more prominent. The observations for this study will be conducted prior to completion of interviews because of the role the researchers play within the role of the women's basketball team. Triangulation will strengthen the credibility of the study because of the field observations, the results gained from interview questions and the perspectives of coaches' interviews since they play an important role of the transfer process (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The interview questions were formatted into a semi-structured format and outline in order to allow for the researcher to adlib as necessary and to allow for the participants to speak freely and honestly about their experience. The questions were focused towards four subjects deemed important to the transfer process as a whole. Those subjects include: previous university, decision to transfer, transfer process, and current experience. Each question was left open-ended to allow for elaboration on the specific question, if need be. The interviewer will not be limited to questions only listed but will allow for participants to lead the discussion in whichever way

they see fit. The questions for coaches are based upon their personal feelings towards the phenomenon and how they feel it affects the integrity of the women's game as a whole.

Data Analysis

Following the data collection process, NVivo 12 software will be used to transcribe the interviews and identify themes because of its 90% accuracy (Nvivo Transcription, 2018). After the interviews are transcribed, the coding process will begin. Key terms and themes will be identified, labeled and categorized to organize the text, highlighting the similarities and differences. Then, myself along with committee members will specifically evaluate the transcribed interviews searching for common themes and patterns that are consistent throughout the responses. That process will also include the coding of themes and editing errors that may be found throughout the transcription process. We will also discuss the themes chosen by the software to confirm its credibility and ensure that no corrections need to be made (Anderson, 2010). The last step includes the verification process in which the interviews will be reviewed once again to ensure every piece of information was accounted for.

Ethics

The main goal of the researcher is to protect the rights, values and identities of each participants of the research study. The identities were difficult to remain anonymous due to the limited pool of participants. Their previous university will not be identified. The researcher will assign pseudonym to each respondent. The participants will be provided of a script informing them of the details and what to expect throughout the research study. The participants will be informed that they can end the interview at any point during the interview session along with declining to respond to certain questions. Upon request the participants can receive the written transcripts and noted observations of their respective interview to view and/or compare the

transcript with their interview and observations to ensure it is coherent and consistent with the information they provided. Since this study focuses on student-athletes who have attended the University of Mississippi, it does not account for the experiences of individuals who leave Division I schools to attend a university in a lower division. To better understand every aspect of the transferring process, future research can be done on that specific population to compare the experiences and expectations. Lastly, this study has been approved by the University of Mississippi Institutional Review Board.

Chapter IV

Results

Following the 2017-18 season, the Ole Miss Rebels administration decided to go another direction in terms of leadership for the women's basketball program. With the change in leadership, nine student-athletes chose to transfer out. Therefore, upon arrival the new head coach, acquired a team of four returning student-athletes. She was then faced with the task of recruiting transfers to build her roster; including nine new faces, six of which were transfers. Transferring is now the common theme in women's college basketball. According to the NCAA transfer portal, there are over 800 student-athletes in the transfer portal. For some, transfers can lead to NCAA tournament runs and national championships and others can lead to the demise of a program.

As the interview process began to unfold, there were many themes identified and similarities between the group. The most common theme discussed was the lack of relationships with the coaching staff, teammates, support staff and athletic administration. The participants were displeased with the lack of "realness" portrayed by those they trusted. After analyzing interview transcriptions, it is evident the participants describe "realness" as being completely open, honest and transparent with one another regardless of outcome. Based off initial university experiences, multiple participants described coaches as not being themselves in which they felt a lack of honesty between coaches and players. Student-athletes described scenarios in which having an individual conversation with a coach providing them with information that seems

promising whereas on the contrary the actions displayed by the coach were inaccurate. Therefore, leaving the student-athlete to question the decision-making skills and credibility of their head coach. The student-athletes placed a huge emphasis on the importance they placed on genuine relationships. After experiencing a violation of those experiences, their trust levels decreased tremendously. Finesse and Grace both described having individual meetings with their previous head coaches, in those meetings they were informed on where they needed improvement in order to earn playing time. The participants diligently worked on their weaknesses and were not rewarded or compensated in any way. Specifically, Finesse experienced post game meetings with her head coach in which he expressed his regret in not allowing her the playing time she deserved. Therefore, resulting in a diminish of trust indicating a violation of the Psychological Contract. Barnhill and Turner's 2013 study expands and further explains how a lack of fulfilled promises can lead to lack of cognitive trust, negative emotional reactions and the intention to transfer contemplations become more frequent. Issues such as culture shock, homesickness and style of play were all factors that led to their departure. The conclusion of all data directed our results to four areas that the results sections will focus on: overall student-athlete experience, relationships, transfer, and current experience.

Overall Student-Athlete Experience

Each participant was very open when discussing their overall student-athlete experiences. This includes the dual identity of being a student and an athlete, including a culmination of academics, social life, environment, basketball and facilities/resources. The challenges of this can often times result in high demands from one aspect therefore diminishing results and increasing challenges making it difficult to perform at high levels in both areas (Goode, 1960).

Some experienced fulfillment in their student identity and a lack thereof as an athlete and vice versa. In an ideal world, a student-athlete would be fulfilled in both areas but in reality, it is difficult to please everyone. Thus, allowing for individuals to make decisions that best suit them and their personal goals. Josephine expressed an unsatisfying taste for the basketball aspect at the initial university.

It was good, outside of basketball I had a great experience. I had lots of friends. I always went places, had fun to do but I hated the basketball side of things. I hated going to practice. I hated going to weights. I hated seeing them (the coaches) every day. I did not want to do it anymore.

The description above leads us to believe the dislikes Josephine experienced at the initial university were due to the coaching style. Her initial universities, style of play can be described as up-tempo, with a spread offense, and position-less basketball. Each individual was treated the same regardless of their strengths and unique style. From the outside looking in, the style is intriguing and not adopted by most universities, but the coach has his own style and has experienced much success in doing so. In discussion with other participants there were those who appreciated both aspects of their identity roles. Finesse stated with a positive and convincing response saying:

It was a great experience. I went to Europe my freshman summer. It was really interesting because we were treated like royalty in the sense that everybody wanted to be around us. Everybody was so nice to us, everybody supported us, so it was a family type of deal. It was a great feeling being around people like you and developing long lasting friendships.

This response conveys the importance that student-athletes place on feeling worthy, wanted and appreciated. The saying goes, “They don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care” (Anonymous). When student-athletes are comfortable in their environments, they are willing to sacrifice and endure for you and the betterment of the team.

As we dissect the term student-athlete, starting with the term student. It is important to note that each participant is serious about academics and through the transition of transferring from institution to institution, it was imperative their academics stayed on track for graduation. When asked about their experience regarding professors and academic support on campus, the responses were intriguing. When asked about academic resources and professors, Josephine said:

Yes, the professors I needed to have a good relationship, I did. The teachers and staff were cool and they placed you in classes with teachers who were sports fans so it was fine when you missed class and needed to make up work.

On the contrary, there were those who were exposed to professors that were not as understanding of the student-athlete life. Grace went through some difficulty at times, sometimes resulting in negative repercussions:

... some of my professors didn't like sports so I had to explain to them that I'm going to be missing class because I'm a basketball player. Some of them were like mmhm, well we don't care. There was one situation where I missed 2 assignments and his response was, you know, sometimes in life you have to just have to deal with things.

Due to a student-athlete vigorous daily schedule, the level of academic support/resources provided to students vary depending on level (Power 5, mid major, junior college, etc.). Those that participated at the Power Five level had access to academic success centers, designed for student-athletes only, where they have access to specified academic counselors, learning specialist, mentors, and tutors. Those who competed on a lower level had limited access to such amenities for due to finances and lack of personnel. Josephine, a 4-4 transfer, had access to a student academic center that was:

The academic center was in the same building as the basketball facility, on the 4th floor. Every coaching staff offices are located in the same building. That's why you run into athletes so much, our practice court and our locker rooms were in the same

location. Men's and women's basketball were the only teams that had their own locker room, every other sport shared.

Josephine experienced the convenience of having everything in one location. Whereas, Finesse and Grace had complete opposite reality. The location was unconventional and the assistance they received was from support staff as opposed to someone who specializes in academics.

Our director of operations was our academic advisor. And not saying that they didn't know what they were talking about but me transferring, (if stayed at initial university) I would have graduated December but I transferred and some kind of way all my credits just disappeared. Study hall.... I would say that you could cheat in study hall there because you could type in what you did. Like you didn't have all the access to tutors and stuff and it was an open tutoring session that you could attend. You're in a little room with six or seven computers... it was just bad.

Grace had a similar experience as Finesse:

I definitely remember we didn't have an academic center, we went to the library. It was like a specific floor designated to us because our library was huge. The 6th floor of the library was specifically for student-athletes.

Although each student-athlete received more assistance than the average student, the above quotes demonstrate how academic resources vary depending on level (Division I, II, III or junior college) but nonetheless the support is still there. For our specific study, academic resources did not factor into student retention, but could a reason for other student-athletes that have transferred.

The goal of a coach during the recruiting process is to not only to make their campus and facilities appeal to the student-athlete, but also to persuade the parents into believing their daughter will be taken care of and treated like family for four years. It is imperative for college coaches to be concerned with every aspect of the student-athlete including academics, physical, emotional, and spiritual (depending on university) well-being and to not only focus on what the student-athlete can do for them. After ensuring success within the classroom, focus can then be

shifted to how they perform on the basketball court. Academics are very important and with the amount of assistance student-athletes are provided it is harder to fail than succeed. While undergoing the rigors of collegiate academia, they are also placed under an enormous amount of pressure to perform at a high level. When asked about the basketball aspect, Josephine chuckled and said:

It was totally different than it is here. Our practices consisted of a lot of shooting drills. I wouldn't say that it made you better as a player, but the system coach ran, everybody is equal and essentially plays the same role. There is not a go-to player on the team, everybody does everything.

To clarify what Josephine is saying, the offensive philosophy at her previous school was to the shoot the three pointers as much as possible. She expressed her dissatisfaction with the style of play at her initial institution because it was not conducive to her abilities. Chanel felt very similar during her time:

Basketball wise I don't feel like I was pushed to be my best. Every day was the same, we did the same workouts and I didn't feel like I was getting better. Workouts were so easy, I wouldn't even sweat.

The same way these student-athletes want to be challenged in the classroom to reach their ultimate goal of graduation, they thrive to have that same experience as athletes, yearning for their bodies and minds to reach new heights, while competing to accomplish the ultimate goal of winning a National Championship.

The last point to address when discussing the full college experience is the social aspects of life. Being a student-athlete is very time consuming, therefore making it difficult to build and maintain relationships outside of your team. Chanel illustrated a response:

I feel like socially I am very outgoing, so it's easy for me to make friends. I have a couple friends, they were sad when I left but it's easy for me to make friends. It's hard to have friends that are not athletes because they don't understand the life of an athlete. They say you are too busy but in a lot of cases it's hard to balance friend time,

academics, and basketball all in one, so it's hard to maintain relationships with people other than your teammates.

Of course, this is not the same for every student-athlete, Finesse was able to speak about her experiences:

I had a little group of friends that lived in dorms down the road from ours. I would go visit, play spades, go shopping, bowling, out to eat and the pool. I still talk to them today, we built a friendship. They really made my time easier and more enjoyable because I could get away and talk to them. I also had friends in the band and they played at our games. They would invite me to their cookouts and stuff. So, I had a lot of friends outside of basketball.

Every individual is different and that is what makes our world unique, some student-athletes are able to have a healthy balance and others are not. A sense of fulfillment in every aspect of the college experience can in most cases lead to a successful and rewarding time in college and a lack of can lead to intentions and actions of transferring.

Relationships

The ultimate goal of Psychological Contract is a sense of fulfillment and because of the Psychological Contract breach, people cannot obtain a sense of fulfillment. The un-fulfillment indicates a discrepancy between their belief and the actual outcomes (or the reality) (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Grace expressed:

My head coach and I really didn't have a relationship, I couldn't really relate to her.

College is a time for growth, when students are learning and trying to figure out who they are as individuals. Sports play a huge role in that process and similar to being at home and having your parents present to raise, guide and mold you, that essentially is the same role your coaching staff fills during your time in college. But with a straight look on her face, when Josephine was asked about her relationship with her coaching staff, without hesitation her response was:

I didn't really have one. Before I got there everything felt very fake for me. They were cool with some people, but for me I just I didn't get that same vibe. It always seemed awkward. Every time I would go in and try to talk to them and they talk to me it was just like quick hi and bye. There was never anything deeper.

The lack of communication between both coach and player can affect each individual differently.

There are some students who may address the issue by having a conversation with their coach and others who will let emotions and negative thoughts fester, regardless of whether or not the situation is handled, a sense of animosity between both parties can build. Chanel was very outward in expressing how she felt to her coaches, the conversation went like this:

Well babe you just can't give up, you know we love you, and I said how you love somebody that you don't even know like you all do not know anything about me. She was like well you have to give us time, I said I have been here for a month now. I said it's been a month and you all have never stopped and checked on me, asked me how my family was doing... I said stop talking to me, you don't even know me... I feel like we were just players to them, and they didn't care to get to know us off the court.

The main focus of the recruiting process is being able to form genuine relationships with prospects. Essentially you are taking these student-athlete from their home and their families and asking them to join yours. It is interesting that participants are on campus and coaches are not taking the initiative to get to know them as more than athletes. Coaches can take initiative by regularly asking their student-athletes how classes are going, how is their family and what is the latest Netflix series they are watching. Those questions may seem minute, but are stepping stones to show your interest in your athlete as a person. Poor relationships with coaching staffs can or cannot filter into personal relationships between teammates. Although Josephine lacked a strong relationship with her coaching staff, when asked about her teammates, her face lit up:

I loved my teammates. We still talk to this day; every time I go home they are the first people I go see. I love them, they are great.

Whereas, when Chanel was asked about her teammates, with a smile on her face yet in a serious tone, she stated:

I used to walk around the locker room with headphones in even if I was not listening to anything. Like I wasn't feeling it, I just didn't want to disappoint my mama, but it got to that point where I just woke up and said, I can't.

A strong relationship with coaches or teammates can sometimes compensate for the lack thereof in other areas. Arianna described her experience with her coaches and teammates. My teammates and I did not “like” our coach, but we respected her in her role/position, as for her teammates:

My teammates, they make sure everybody felt as if we were sisters and apart of the team. If we had a problem with each other, we made sure not to show them on the basketball court. We handled it together and did not include our coaches. So, I thought we were the true definition of a family and a sisterhood and our coach made sure we were a family and couldn't tell that anything was wrong.

Both Josephine and Arianna's statements depict they had great relationships with their teammates and although they had experienced difficult situations through the basketball aspect, that the bond and relationships built with their teammates were very important and meaningful for them. Due to that bond, their teammates were very supportive of the decisions made because ultimately, they wanted what was best. Chanel struggled with relationships between coaches and teammates which led to a very difficult experience for anyone to handle. Each participant spoke boldly when asked about their relationship and interactions with coaches and teammates. College basketball is a year-round sport, therefore being able to enjoy those around you is a very important factor.

Transfer

All participants revealed and shared different stories and situations of occurrences that took place that played a role into why they wanted to transfer. They now have a better understanding of what factors are important when deciding where to go to school. Josephine shared:

He [the head coach of the original institute] just wasn't straightforward, he made it seem like if you have questions come see me, so I would go talk to him. He just kept telling me you're doing really well, you're doing this and doing that, but I wasn't playing. He kept saying all this stuff, I was doing it and nothing was changing. So, I said after my freshman year I was going to give it another chance, but then after my sophomore year I said I can't do it anymore because it's only four years. It's not unlimited time you have in college. So, I decided to leave.

It is interesting to note, Josephine did not leave following her freshman season. Freshman year is tough for everyone. In Megan Bender 2017 study, she interviewed a student athlete from Loyola Marymount University (LMU) who expressed how people are not aware of what it is like to be a student athlete, "... you eat, sleep and breathe school and sports; it consumes your entire life" (Bender, 2017). College is an adjustment, being away from home for the first time, academics are challenging and basketball is more demanding than it has ever been. The willingness to give the school another opportunity shows true character and strength. Finesse shared a very similar experience:

I would have to say the day that I could not make a sprint and was kicked out of practice. I told myself, then I can't do this anymore. I quit. I hate it. I don't want to be here I want to leave. During every game it was just like can it be over with? I was not playing and I was ready to go. So, I told my parents that I wanted to leave, but at the same time, I did not do everything it took to transfer. I wasn't in the best shape and I wasn't giving it my all, like I should have, so I ended up completing my sophomore year. I did my part, worked on my game and got in shape and I still didn't play. Therefore, following my sophomore season, I decided to transfer.

There were two participants who could not see themselves staying at the university for more than one year and made the decision to transfer. Grace shared her story:

I just felt like it wasn't that great because a lot of reasons. It was my first time moving away from home, there was a huge culture shock. The first couple months were hard for me. It was toward the end of my freshman year that I realized I couldn't see myself staying at that school for four years. I did not have much of a social life and there was a lot I needed to think about, but I knew I couldn't do it for four years.

Grace was very passionate about her experiences, while sharing her story you could tell she was almost reliving her time there and by her facial expressions it did not seem to be an enjoyable time. Along with Grace, Chanel displayed an attitude of regret and pain:

I did not enjoy waking up every morning feeling depressed and unwanted. I would call my mother everyday crying and not knowing what was wrong. I felt that I made a wrong decision. I should have weighed my options instead of making up my mind so early in the recruiting process.

These decisions and emotions are hard to decipher through at 18 or 19 years old and typically behind every successful athlete, there is a strong support system. That group becomes even smaller when the time comes to make important decisions. In conclusion, the intent of wanting to transfer is a difficult decision in itself, but it becomes harder when you have to walk into your coaches office and inform them and your teammates of your premature departure. Each participant expressed having a tight inner circle in which they confided in during the entire transfer process from initial thoughts to choosing a new university to attend. Those circles included their parents, high school and Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) coaches and trusted mentors.

Some participants had difficult conversations regarding their intentions to transfer with college coaches and teammates while other interactions were more complicated.

Josephine stated with an almost smart look on her face:

It wasn't hard for me to tell my coaches at all. I was on a partial release where I could still talk to coaches but I was still on my scholarship. So, I was able to come back if I didn't find another school. He was not bitter or anything, the difficult time came when I had to tell my teammates. We cried and it was sad because I did not want to leave them, but they understood that I had to do what was best for me.

On the contrary, not all college coaches were as accepting as the previous story. Grace had a somewhat different experience:

She didn't want me to leave because I was one of the best players on the team. She had a slight attitude and called a meeting with the other coaches and in the end, they were trying to convince me to stay. They were not helpful during the process and telling my teammates was easy because I did not have a relationship with them from the beginning.

Typically, the process of telling your coaches and teammates is the hardest. The difficulty with coaches comes from their actions following your decision. Coaches have the power to make the transfer process very difficult for you, the information they relay to other coaches, and have the ability to make your remaining days at the university extremely challenging. As for teammates, there tends to be a unique bond between a group that has endured a journey together and therefore breaking that bond can be emotional. Once that is complete, the fun begins by going through the recruiting process all over again, searching for what you were missing and more.

Current Experience

It is difficult to determine whether transferring is a positive or negative solution without comparing the previous experience to those they have encountered while attending the University of Mississippi. Based off the interviews conducted, there was a split between those who were satisfied with their decision to transfer and those who were still uncertain. Josephine was very descriptive and specific about the dislikes from her previous school, whereas when asked about her current situation, with an immediate response she replied, “I love it”! She is pleased with the level of honesty, trust and relatability she has with her coaches, and teammates. Josephine was able to explain and have a clear understanding of her role (on the basketball court) and what was expected of her. She was held to a higher standard by creating personal and team goals that were discussed between her and her position coach. Perhaps because she made those goals in collaboration with her coach, she worked hard to meet the expectations her coaches, teammates and most importantly, herself. Grace also fell into the category of loving her current situation and being overjoyed with her process and decision. Grace came to Ole Miss as a graduate transfer, meaning she was a college graduate seeking to further her education and potential athletic opportunity in graduate school because she had a year of eligibility remaining.

Her initial comment was, “I wish I had more time with Coach A” because of her influence and the valuable lessons learned involving basketball, my future and life in general. As she began to go more in depth, not only was the impact imprinted on her as a basketball player, but how to be an African American woman in today’s society. Bower and Hums (2014) study examined mentoring relationships of working women within collegiate athletics. The influences that arose from the study show the impact women can have on one another which is heightened when a student-athlete sees someone that looks like them. Characteristics such as counseling, role modeling, acceptance, confirmation, coaching, exposure and visibility are all factors that are enhanced when young women are supported and led by other strong women. Race and gender may not seem important to fans and supporters, but coaches have lasting impact on the lives of their student-athletes, positively and negatively. Grace believes that her maturity level, self-esteem and national recognition could be even greater if she only had the chance to spend the entire four years at Ole Miss. Like Grace, Finesse was very pleased with her current experience at the University of Mississippi. Starting out at a Power 5 institution, transferring to a mid-major for 2 years and back to a Power 5 school she describes her journey as, “... wasting two years of her life.” Now accustomed to charter flights, catered meals, and an abundance of resources, she likes how the Ole Miss team allowed her to finish her career in style. She also comments on the lasting relationships that she established and cultivated with coaches and teammates, how the city of Oxford welcomed her with open arms, and the mark she left on an up and coming basketball program.

On the contrary, some participants were misled and their reality did not meet their expectations. Vickie established a previous relationship with the head coach and saw attending Ole Miss as another opportunity, but she described her experience as,

I did not mess Ole Miss and the city of Oxford. I feel weird out here, I don't feel like myself. I'm always down out here. I can never really go a day without being mad. And the basketball aspect has been a rollercoaster, there are days I would show spurts and others where I would let my mental get the best of me.

Attending a university can be an adjustment and depending on your upbringing and what you are used too, the environment can be a factor. Arianna's dislike for Oxford made the adjustment period more difficult. Basketball motivated her and once that became no longer her safe space, she struggled to find other entertainment. Arianna and coaches had a mutual respect for one another and she felt the team consist of many small cliques, but her experience as an athlete are what led to her decision. She just wanted to be happy again. When Chanel was asked about her experience she described every aspect,

For this to be a college town, the city of Oxford closes too early... They need more stores and fun things to do... There was a lack of support from the wider community. The academic resources were very helpful, but I was not fond of our counselor. As for basketball, I did not feel all my teammates were bought into what we were trying to accomplish and some members of the coaching staff were not mature and did not belong on this level.

In the previous two sections, the goal was to provide readers with a full understanding of student-athletes journey from start to finish. It is impossible for one university to please everyone, which is why the recruiting process for coaches as well as the prospective student-athlete is so important and it is imperative for everyone to do their due diligence to ensure the best decision is made for both parties involved. Transferring can be deemed as a solution for some and others are still in search for that right fit.

Lessons

After having gone through the initial recruiting process, the student-athletes were very clear on what they were searching for in another university. Vickie was simply looking for a school where she could:

... simply ball out to be honest, to by myself and ball.

Finesse had a similar search based off her previous experiences:

... ready to play and to show my skills and just to prove what I can do on the basketball court...

But a factor that resonated through the majority of the participants was an honest and open lines of communication between them and their head coach. Josephine answered abrupt and confidently when asked what she was searching for:

Realness in coaches. They were just telling me what I wanted to hear, they wouldn't just say I'll play because I can do this. I want coaches that will say if you do this, you will play and if you don't do this, you will not play. Just because you can score, does not mean that you will play for me, you have to be able to do other things. I want coaches that won't give up on me basically.

The young adults want to play, be successful, feel appreciated while growing and maturing into the best individuals they can be. During the interview, the student-athletes had the opportunity to reflect on parts of their journey. Concluding that interview, they were asked if they had any regrets based upon the decisions they made in the past. All but one participant denied regretting any part of their journey. Some of those responses were:

I cannot say I regret it. I'm blessed for this opportunity, to even come here, it is an opportunity I will learn from. (Arianna)

Nope. I am happy. (Josephine)

I used to but I don't anymore because I feel like the decisions I made, made me the person I am today and I like the person I am today. Do I think about what if I would have stayed what would have happened? Yes, I do, but I also get to say that not many people can say they went high, low and back high. I've been to the highest level and been to one of the lowest levels and I came back up so I've had a taste of both worlds. I've learned how to be appreciative and be grateful for every opportunity I have had. (Grace)

The lone participant, Chanel, had regrets and paused for a minute or two to ponder everything she has endured, responding open and honestly about her true feelings.

I feel like I regret just coming back to another D1 school, I feel like for me to grow I should have gone to Junior College for one year honestly just because I know mentally I'm not all the way there yet. I regret not weighing my options, I regret, I don't know, not giving people chances. I regret a lot of stuff, but that is life and what God has for me is for me, as they say one door closes and another one opens.

According to Madrigal et. al (2017), regret is, “traditionally defined as a negative emotion experienced when one believes an action or series of actions could have been carried out more effectively” (43). As often as we try to make the correct decisions for ourselves, there are sometimes where situations do not work out in our favor. The negative effects of regret may lead to a feeling of personal failure causing the individual to feel as if they made the wrong decision and acted differently (Madrigal, Robbins and Stanley, 2017). If these emotions are dismissed and not handled properly or accordingly, the chances of transferring increases tremendously.

Lastly, the best way to help someone else is to be willing to share your story and provide suggestions and hope they do not end up making the same mistakes that you do. The participants were asked if they had any recommendations for future student-athletes that may be considering to transfer or for those coming out of high school and in the process of choosing a school. It was apparent after analysis of the data a unanimous phrase was to weigh your options and take your time. Grace begged student-athletes, future and current:

I would say take your time. You cannot base lifetime decisions off temporary feelings. Not being happy is not a legit reason for why you want to transfer. Let it be deeper than that. Because you're not happy is a surface issue, that can be fixed, that's something that could change by tomorrow, but if it's like root, grounded issues that will take time to fix, then you may want to transfer. At the end of the day, make the best decision for you, yourself and your well-being.

Vickie provided her answer by consistently shaking her head, reminiscing and hoping she had taken her own advice:

Weigh your options, really sit down and talk during the recruiting process, don't mainly talk to the coach but talk to current players and try to spend time with. Choose wisely, ask the right questions to the right people and don't act out of emotion.

Finesse provided an enlightening response when asked the very same question:

I will say when looking for a school, don't go for the name. Do not be ashamed to go to a lower school because that doesn't mean you're not good enough, lower level schools have produced many success stories. Do your research. Look at the history of the program and their post graduate success rate. Try to determine the truth from the lies because every coach will tell you whatever they can to get you to go there.

The transfer process focuses a lot on the student-athlete, but we cannot forget another important factor that is affected by this trend; the coaches. Two coaches apart of the staff were interviewed for this study. Their questions included the impact of transfers, current and future, the process of recruiting transfers and retention of current student-athletes. When Coach A was asked about the impact of transfers, she wanted to say a lot because she is a fan of transfers and on a daily basis lives firsthand through the process.

Totally changing the game, I mean it's winning people championships. Case in point Baylor took a transfer from LSU which became a key player for them. I think it's spoken in a positive way but it also can spur the transfer situation because players are seeing other people come in and they start worrying wondering about where they're going to fit in the whole rotation. So sometimes it's accelerating programs but it's putting programs back to because if you take the wrong transfer. It could hurt you.

Coach A is a visual learner and therefore painted a picture for her take on the issue:

Well I think it's crazy. We are in the generation of when you get a new cell phone and that phone works perfectly, but if they come out with a red one or your favorite color then you get it. Why? Because you can.

She placed no other rhyme or reason other than it is the new thing to do. Society makes transferring look appealing without regard for what it fully entails and her fellow colleague agreed:

I think with the transfers is basically going to change the game for sure because it changes how coaches go about recruiting and depth charts from year to year.

A depth chart is a diagram coaches use to rank their current team by position and acknowledge the needs of the team moving forward. If a highly touted recruit were to enter the transfer portal, a coach could recruit and potentially sign that player. Eliminating space and scholarships for current seniors in high school. The benefit of a transfer is their experience of playing college basketball. They are further along than an incoming freshman would be. Accepting transfers into your program can positively and negatively affect your team. Baylor Lady Bears won the 2019 NCAA Championships, and the Final Four Most Valuable Player, Chloe Jackson, a transfer from Louisiana State University (LSU). On the contrary, there are coaches who have accepted players without fully evaluating their overall impact on the program. In such situations, coaches tend to focus on their talents and abilities which can overshadow a students' character as a team player. As a coach, it is very important to research as much information on the prospect before opening your program to them. Coach B believes when recruiting transfers:

I think it is always important to call the former coach, high school, college and AAU. Sometimes coaches will be honest about what or why the kid might be leaving or what their situation maybe. As a coach you want to talk to everybody in their circle because each individual will give you pieces of that kid that could be helpful information.

Coach A has specific criteria that she uses as a guideline as to whether or not she will go after a transfer:

Well, I'm looking for people that can help me. People don't take transfers because they like to take transfers. They take transfers for a few things. One they're looking for someone that can come in and help. It's worth them investing in them for a year. That they'll come in and be an immediate impact. The following year or years you have time to develop their deficiencies without wasting a year. We are struggling right now because a lot of the people that are transferring, we don't really know and because we don't know them it's scary and we truly do not fully understand what we are getting ourselves into. So, for me I'm only taken them if they can really help us or a situation where they can or I have to be a situation where they can. Where I've recruited them before and I've had a preexisting relationship so I know what I'm getting.

Taking transfers can be just as rewarding as it can be risky. Coaches do not go into a program claiming to build success off transfers. Therefore, it is important that once coaches sign student-athletes and get them on campus, it is imperative for them to be creative and find ways to retain them. Coach A shared her advice on how to go about doing so:

I see now you have to recruit your kids over after every season. They want to feel loved and the way society makes transfers look like it's the thing to do. You have to meet with your players, you have to spend time with them. I believe you can avoid transfers from how you recruit, instead of only focusing on talent, do a little bit more in-depth research and create stronger bonds with them while they are here and before in the process so that they fully understand what you're trying to accomplish and your plans for them. Because let's just face it when the kid goes to college, they want to know what's in it for them even though it's a team sport.

The current study focuses mainly on the motivations and factors to why student-athletes transfer. It is important to note that student-athletes are not the only component, college coaches also play a role. Coaches have different opinions regarding transfers, which is why I include coaches in this study. A head coach's job description is unending, but those coaches who are dedicated to upholding the integrity of basketball itself and constantly strive to enhance the women's game are having the tough conversations with each other of how to reduce to the amount of transfers.

The purpose of this chapter was to highlight the main findings that derived from the interviews that took place. It is clear that the findings of this study cover the entire process these selected participants have undergone in order to reach their destination of being an Ole Miss Rebel. As the results show, their overall student-athlete experience, relationships, transfers and lessons learned are the main areas of focus. The data collected tells a story and provides further explanation as to why and how these situations take place along with advice from individuals who have undergone the process. However, as discussed in the literature review, every individual is different and no one's experience is greater than the other, but the ability to see their stories side by side will provide a better understanding and data to be added to the existing literature.

Chapter V

Discussion

The current study examined themes and interrelations between themes involved in the transfer process for women's college basketball players. Interview questions covered four main areas of their college career including their experience at the initial university, the decision to transfer, the transfer process and their current experience here at The University of Mississippi. This chapter will illustrate why the findings are relevant to this case study and enhance the current body of literature. The findings of this study are based on the explanation and analysis of data obtained through the semi-structured interviews of six participants, who have gone through the transfer process and two coaches that rely heavily on the transfer portal for the success of their program. The student-athletes were the primary focus, but interviewing the coaches allowed for complete comprehension of the process. From the responses, four informants broadly defined areas related directly to telling the complete story of why student-athletes transfer: overall student-athlete experience (at initial institution), relationships (with coaches, teammates, academic support and administration), transferring, and lessons learned. Based off the findings, there is a clearer idea of what student-athletes are searching for during their collegiate experience. In this study, many aspects and motivations were identified to explain why our informants transferred from their initial universities. The findings of the current study are consistent with Tinto's (1993) regarding retention/attrition of students, student retention/transfers and student-athlete retention/ transfer. The findings are consistent in which students need to feel

wanted a sense of support in order to produce and succeed at a high level. In chapter 2, we discussed Tinto's six factors that attributed to a student's success in higher education to their ability to adapt to the college life as a student and as an athlete and whether or not they feel a part of the community. The intent of a head coach or coaching staff, commitment to the program and institution, an adjustment to college academia and college athletics, the difficulty of being successful in all areas, having the right "fit", and missing out on normal college student activities as well as holidays and family time. Each of which were voiced at one point or another by participants during the interview process. Regardless of academia or college athletics, there is some similarities in experiences between groups. More importantly, a student-athlete may be doubly overwhelmed due to these characteristics effect in the classroom and on the basketball court.

Based off the initial list of themes chosen from the transcriptions, the most efficient way to combine their experience at the initial institution was to combine the main aspects of being a student-athlete, which included phrases from these main areas: academics, the athletic side and extra-curricular activities/social life. All participants reported as being serious students in the classroom and despite their transitions, have full intentions of completing their degree requirements and graduating on time. Due to the schedule and vigor of being a college student-athlete, they are provided with extra services, specifically for them, to ensure they are completing all assignments and staying the course academically. The 40 plus hours per week that a student-athlete devotes to their sport result in less time for academic obligations and activities (Harrison, 2011). Therefore, depending on level, some athletes may receive more assistance or

access to more resources than others, but each participant expressed how beneficial those services have been to them. Vincent Tinto (1993) determined a major determining factor (of retention) was to the degree in which student-athletes became indulged into academics and social systems at their institutions. Participants of the current study expressed the strong relationships built with academic advisors and mentors. They provided student-athletes with academic advice and an outlet for other issues they may encounter as a student-athlete. The junior college students shared how their institutions consisted mainly of athletes and the majority of them were placed in similar classes. They did not have access to the academic resources such as student-athlete academic centers and felt the professors were very lenient on them. They were not as invested into the “student” themselves. Overall, none of the subjects had negative remarks in regards to their academic support. One participant, exposed to professors who were not supporters and therefore, penalized the student-athlete. Based on future career goals, there were no situations of majors not being allowed because of basketball schedule conflicts.

The second point is athletics, since they are student-athletes, the athletic portion involving, the coaching staff, teammates, facilities, and competition level can be very important factor resulting in the intent to transfer. Data analysis confirmed the practical reasons why student-athletes may transfer mention in the literature review. The reasons listed in chapter 2 include: Coaching change and coaching style (Mageua & Vallerand, 2003), lack of playing time (Emma, 2018), homesickness (College Homesickness, 2019), not the right fit (Duffek, 2017), and family issues (Scarbinsky, 2012). The participants identified for this study did not experience a coaching change. However, style of play was a factor for one participant, “I like to play fast and up tempo, we had to slow the game down and walk the ball down the court and that did not suit how I like to play basketball” (Vickie). Although basketball is a simple game, there are different

ways/styles that it can be played and it is important for student/athletes to play within a system that allows them to thrive. Basketball is a team sport, but only 5 players can be on the court at one time. College teams comprise of 12-15 scholarship athletes, depending on the preference of the head coach. In reality, everyone will not be able to play the entire game, but majority of student-athletes believe if they work hard on a daily basis, they deserve to play. One participant shared that she refused to sit on anyone's bench. Playing time can be deemed as a, "pay your dues and your time will come" motto. Not everyone is willing or mentally strong enough to persevere through those times and wait their turn. A lack of playing time is consistent with, "He just kept telling me you're doing you're doing really well you're doing this and doing that. But I wasn't playing. I was just like Well okay this is this isn't it" (Josephine) and "I want to go. I'm getting tired of this. I'm not playing, I want to go. And I told my parents I said hey I want to leave. I just want to get up out of here" (Grace). The initial university was deemed as not being the right "fit" based off quotes such as, "I had certain aspects of my game taken away that I used to do and it was different. Basketball used to be fun for me, but it's not anymore" (Arianna). A coach may not be playing you for specific reasons the student-athlete may not understand. In 2019, O'Neil and Hodge studied coaching styles through autonomous and controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation allows for the athlete to feel a sense of choice and self-motivation when engaging in their respective sport. Controlled motivation is when the individual feels internal or external pressure from someone other than themselves (O'Neil & Hodge, 2019). In order for an athlete to perform consistently at their best, research shows the positive outcomes of an autonomous coaching style. In order for this to happen, there is a level of trust that must be built and maintained between both parties. The ability to do so produces a motivated collection of individuals competing for the same goal, the lack thereof, creates an almost diplomatic

environment in which controlled motivation is implemented occasionally resulting in decisions to transfer. A lack of playing time or motivation does not diminish their ability, but the job of the head coach is to place a product on the court that can compete at a high level and ultimately win games. Regardless of your playing time, every member of the team should feel important and know their role is important. It is imperative for open lines of communication between athlete and coaching staff to ensure everyone agrees and understands the common goal.

Lastly, homesickness is a real issue. One that is experienced by students who are enduring their first time away from home in an unfamiliar environment. This issue is not limited to student-athletes and can be experienced by anyone. Grace stated, "I was frustrated I wasn't able to see my family like I was used to and I didn't have a lot of friends that I could relate to." In some situations, students are able to overcome and other times it becomes consuming and leads the student to attend a school closer to home (College Homesickness, 2019).

The third and final piece of overall student-athlete experience is their social life. Weiss and Robinson study (2013) found that even though student-athletes spend a lot of their time competing and with their teammates, they do not feel as if they are missing out on the college experience. Aaron Clopton (2012) also found in his study that females value and are more likely to have more impactful relationships with teammates and coaches than their male counterparts. This stands true for the current study, all but one participant shared they had friends outside of their teammates and if not, they had great relationships with their teammates and therefore were able to live the normal college lifestyle. The subject that did not agree with the majority equated her issues, not to having a hard time of making friends in college, but having a difficult time maintaining and fostering those relationships due to her daily schedule and requirements. Women are more likely to yearn and search for friendship, unselfishness, concern for others,

support and emotional expression (Clopton, 2012). The ability to or lack of forming genuine relationships with teammates or other individuals on campus can be a factor in the decision to transfer process. In order to ensure a complete student-athlete experience, it would be ideal each of these categories to be sufficient enough for the individual. A lack thereof in one area could trigger the thought of transferring to arise. It may not be possible to accommodate everyone in each of these areas, but those that find and deem what is important to them will be sure to make the right decision that fits their needs.

Student-Athlete Retention

Student-athletes place a huge emphasis on creating, cultivating and maintaining genuine relationships with teammates, coaches, support staff and administration. The strength of relationships can compensate for a lack in another area of the overall student-athlete experience. The coach and player relationship are the most important that participants spoke very strongly about. The junior college subjects, Arianna and Vickie, had no ill feelings towards their coaches. They were grateful for the role they played in their lives and they learned a lot from them. The remaining participants were highly dissatisfied with their relationships with former head coaches. They felt a lack of trust, feelings of being unappreciated and unworthy. It is for coaches to create programs that build strong relationships between students, coaches and support staff because these will keep students from feeling isolated and alienated in their new social setting and create a sense of family providing them a safe space to learn and grow. Simons et al. (1999) conducted a study measuring achievement motivation through the self-worth theory. According so Simons et. al., “self-worth is determined by an individual's own, and others’ perceptions of one’s ability perceptions that are mainly tied to successful achievement (p.152), which correlates with the psychological contract discussed in the literature review. In the article *Broken Promises: The*

Effect of Psychological Contract Violation on Student-Athlete Trust and Intentions to Leave Their Team, Barnhill and Turner (2013) found,” ...that when student-athletes believe that their coaches have failed to fulfill obligations or perceived promises, their relationship with their coaches and team are altered (p.189). When there is no trust, student-athletes are skeptical in their decisions and that level of trust is hard to regain. The recruiting process is a contract. Coaches will persuade a student-athlete to attend their university and fail to follow through on promises all the time. When that contract is violated, student-athletes are more inclined to transfer. The head coach believes in order to retain your student-athletes, you must re-recruit them following the completion of each season. Young adults need to feel worthy, appreciated and taken care of. Coaches that are able to accomplish all three have a low turnover rate and very successful programs. Typical recruiting visits allow for a lot of time spent with the current team and prospects have to opportunity to determine whether or not they will be able to mesh with the group. The feeling following that recruiting visit interaction with potential future teammates plays an important role in the decision-making process whether or not to attend that university. Coaches tell current players all the time, they are essentially the “closers”. During the recruiting process, prospects build relationships with coaches, and it is not until they come on campus when relationships begin to form with potential future teammates. The participants in this study were divided as to who had great relationships with their teammates and those that did not. At the end of the day, those relationships did not affect their decision to stay or transfer, but those were difficult conversations to have included many tears and sincere emotion. As for administrative support, one group stated they felt very supported and the other saying they felt a lack of support from the administration. Regardless of their response, the support coming from this area did not factor in the ultimate decision.

The transfer process is delicate, quick and tedious. There tends to be a quick turnaround between announcing your transfer and announcing your commitment to another institution. The reasons and experiences vary throughout the select population with some overlapping similarities. Each participant had a “intent to transfer” moment or a defining moment that eliminated room for discussion. In some cases, the student-athletes did not necessarily want to transfer, but made a decision that was best for them. The junior college system is different and following completion of associate's degree, they are eligible to transfer to a four-year institution with two years of remaining eligibility. The remaining participants, 4-4 transfers, handled the process following proper protocol. In searching for a new institution, the student-athletes were in search of coaches that would be brutally honest with them while challenging them to reach their full potential. Someone that would nurture and ensure they were growing mentally, physically, and emotionally. They wanted an opportunity to compete at the highest level and be challenged to become to best versions of themselves. Choosing the University of Mississippi has been one of the best decisions majority of the participants have made. Many of them experienced playing for an African American female for the first time in their lives. Mentoring is very important in any industry someone pursues. In 2016, Smith et al. performed a study in which the researchers interviewed female athletic directors and graduate assistants to investigate the importance mentoring had on both professional development and psychosocial support. Four themes transpired from their research: importance of mentorship, quality of mentorship, availability and lack of female mentorship (Smith et al., 2016). Although a student-athlete may not always understand or acknowledge the methods behind certain actions, the lessons learned through collegiate basketball often resurface during adulthood and the recollections of previous experiences are imperative to the success of the individual and their ability to persevere and

conquer. One participant wishes she could have more time here. The lessons she has learned in this one year have been instrumental in her growth as a young woman. The motto here is, “No Ceilings,” there is no limit to what these student-athletes can accomplish. With the right motivation, support and admiration these young women will break glass ceilings and defy the odds.

The lessons learned throughout this process ultimately made these young women who they are today and for that they are grateful for every experience they have encountered. The advice shared would be very beneficial to someone thinking about transferring or prospective student-athletes that are currently going through the recruiting process. Choosing a school is a difficult process. You build great relationships with so many people, essentially every school is offering the same experience, but you are left to decipher through the small talk and far-fetched stories of who they can make you become. Focus on your personal values, career goals and deliberate with your circle to decide which coaching staff is best suitable to helping you accomplish your dreams.

Limitations

There were several limitations that were considered during and at the completion of this study. First, due to the small population amount, the findings may not be generalizable for the entire population. Further studies can access a larger population across multiple sports in order to gain information that can be generalizable for the entire population. Also, the participants were members of the Ole Miss women’s basketball team, therefore the responses were limited to their personal experience and not conducive to the remaining 300 plus schools within the NCAA. This study only focuses on student-athletes that have transferred to Ole Miss and not those that have transferred from the university. If the purpose of the study is Ole Miss, those student-athletes

experiences should be included. The results would provide researchers with information regarding why students attend and leave the University of Mississippi. There are many parameters that can be placed upon such study; conferences, sports, male/female, etc. Secondly, my role and relationship with current student-athletes may have caused manipulation in their responses due to my role on the coaching staff among other reasons. I was the graduate assistant for the women's basketball program, therefore I had relationships and worked closely with both the student-athletes and coaching staff. Participants could manipulate their answers in fear of their responses being relayed to coaches. An individual that has zero connection to the program could possibly lead to more transparency. Thirdly, the interviews were based upon memory of experiences and recall bias may have been present throughout the interview process. For future research, it may be beneficial to follow students along the journey once their transfer is announced. It will allow for accurate data throughout the entire process, step by step. Along with that, the student-athlete population is a homogeneous population, therefore future studies can investigate transfer rates based on gender, race/ethnicity, sport and level to fully understand the phenomenon. Lastly, the student-athlete population is essential to universities and the college experience, and for this reason should be researched for academic purposes to enhance the body of literature and ensure intercollegiate administrators are providing student-athletes the tools needed to be successful during their eligibility and beyond.

Chapter VI

Implications & Conclusion

Implications

The student-athletes were motivated in participating in this research study because it was seen as an opportunity for them to express themselves, tell their story and possibly help someone else who is having similar experiences. Relationships were a reoccurring theme throughout the interviews. Student-athletes place a huge emphasis on the importance of genuine relationships. It was apparent that they struggled with finding those at their initial universities whether it was with their coaches or teammates. The lack of relationships seemed to affect their overall student-athlete experience as well as their playing experience. We can learn from the key themes of this study the importance that should be placed on the recruiting process by the coaching staff and the prospective student-athlete. For the most part, the resources are similar, the focus must change from “things” (gear, facilities, travel, etc.) to understanding the culture, environment and people one will be surrounding themselves around for four years. Parents and coaches should be involved and invested to asking the right questions and eliminate the surface level conversations.

According to the NCAA Transfer Portal, a site designed only for NCAA coaches and staff, as of July 17, 2019, there are over 900 names in the transfer portal. There has been a steady increase over the last five years and the conversations regarding retention and transfers have been prominent in today’s society. There are questions regarding the impact of transfers on women’s basketball as a whole and the effects it has on the future of college athletics. The

current study focuses on student-athletes that have transferred to the University of Mississippi. If time permitted, this study would be more credible if student-athletes that transferred out of Ole Miss, during the coaching turnover, along with their current experience at new institution were included in the data collection and analysis. Doing so would provide a more complete understanding to the effect transferring has on the success of a program. Future studies should address a wide variety of student-athletes from different universities, conferences and levels. There is a substantial gap in the literature regarding a student-athletes intent to transfer. Intercollegiate athletics is a multibillion- dollar corporation and the money generated is very integral to the universities overall budget. Since student-athletes play a factor in the grand scheme, they should be researched and studied in order for administrators to ensure they continue to do their due diligence towards and for them. A student-athlete experience is different than a regular college student and they oftentimes face obstacles that need to be addressed.

Women often find themselves in a tough situation between a focus on athletic skills, resulting in no fan base, and the over sexualization of women in sports, there are multiple battles and obstacles female athletes face on a daily basis (Person, 2010). Women will continue to fight an uphill battle in order to receive equal treatment in college athletics. Although we have come a long way since the implementation of Title IX, there is so much ground to be covered in order to continue to break the glass ceilings of women in sports, specifically college athletics.

Our current study did not result in a solid conclusion, but the information gathered brings about awareness to a reoccurring issue and forms the groundwork of research for others to build upon. There are no right or wrong answers and it is impossible for coaches to please every young person, but the findings provide coaches and administrators with topics and issues that are important to student-athletes which can better assist them in how they conduct their programs.

Future studies could be categorized in many different ways, specific universities can evaluate their transfer rates as a whole, regardless of sport. Others can study their women's program for a 5-year span, for example or even focus the study for a specific sport within a specific conference. Future studies can focus on certain factors such as stress levels experienced by student-athletes or how important the player coach relationship is to student-athlete retention.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to determine factors and motivations that played a role in why student-athletes decided to transfer from one institution to another. The foregoing chapters collected data on their previous experience at the initial institution, the decision to transfer, the transfer process and their current experience at Ole Miss. The research questions were examined through a qualitative approach in the form of semi-structured interviews and observations. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for a more in depth understanding into the entire transfer process, the good, the bad and the ugly. A review of literature was presented, due to the lack of literature regarding the student-athlete population, the current study was based on previous student retention/ attrition and student transfer studies because the reasons one individual decides to leave can be the very reason another decides to stay. Lastly, an analysis of the data was conducted, themes were identified, labeled and categorized forming constructs in which we based our findings for the current study.

The findings of this study were congruent with that of Vincent Tinto's 1993 study based on student retention along with psychological contract in regards to relationships with coaches and staffs. Resulting in relationships being the most dominant reason we have found in the data. The main goal of the study was to bring awareness and inform coaches and intercollegiate administrators of factors that are important to the current student-athletes. An interesting point to

make, student-athletes are staying the same age, whereas administrators and coaches are aging and becoming more and more disconnected with the current generation. Therefore, it is important for them to stay current and educated. Coaches can use this information to retain their student-athletes and better understand their student-athletes to ensure they are providing them with the proper tools needed to become the best version of themselves, on and off the basketball court.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES

Previous Institution

What factors led you to attend your previous University?

How would you describe your student-athlete experience at that institution?

What were the pros of attending that university?

What were the cons of attending that institution?

What was your relationship with the coaching staff like?

- What did you like about the coaching staff?
- What did you dislike about the coaches?
- What do you think the coaches could have done better?

Tell me about your teammates.

- What was your relationship with them like?
- Did they make you feel part of the team?
 - If so, how?
 - If not, what made you feel excluded?

How was your overall experience?

Tell me about your academic activities at that institution.

What was your relationship with faculty members in your major?

What was your relationship with other classmates (other than your teammates)?

Do you think your experience impacted your performance on the team? How?

Have you ever felt any burnout at that institution?

If yes, what made you feel burnout? (e.g., injury, time management)

Decision to Transfer

When did you have the first inclination of wanting to transfer?

When did you make the final decision to transfer?

How did you come to that decision?

How difficult was that process? (telling staff and teammates)

Did anyone assist you during the process? If so, who?

What would have needed to change in order for you to stay at your initial institution?

Transfer Process

How did you go about the process of finding a new institution?

What were you looking for when deciding where to move next?

Your major has been changed?

If yes, what made you change it?

What were you looking for when deciding where to move next?

Current Experience

How would you describe your current position here at Ole Miss?

How does your experience here compare to your previous school?

- Basketball team (coach/staff/teammates)
- Major (faculty members/classmates)
- City/Town/Environment
- Work load (both training and school work)
- Support from Ole Miss athletic department

Do you have any regrets of the decisions you made to leave and come to Ole Miss?

- What does Ole Miss do well?
- What does it need to work on?

Do you have any suggestions or recommendations for future student-athletes who currently considering transfer like you?

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR COACHES:

Interview Questions for Coaches

What are your thoughts on the transfer epidemic that is going on in women's college basketball?

Why do you think student-athletes are transferring?

If you need to decide whether you accept transfer students or not, what aspects are you going to consider? (e.g., athletic ability, personal characteristics, etc.)

How can you retain your student-athletes?

Have you been able to acquire transfer student-athletes?

What impact do you feel transfers have on the game as a whole?

- If you think it's good for the game, what do you think needs to be done to retain student-athletes?
- If you think it's bad for the game, what do you believe needs to be done in order to decrease the amount of transfer student-athlete?

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